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ABSTRACT

To ensure that future generations of girls as well as boys fulfill their potential without restriction, it is important that gender equity be taught in teacher education programs as a matter of course. Gender equity is defined as the set of behaviors and knowledge that permits educators to recognize inequality in educational opportunities, to carry out specific interventions that constitute equal educational treatment, and to ensure equal educational outcomes. Gender inequity is manifested by: (1) notions that males excel in mathematics, science, and technology and that females excel in the arts; (2) attributional theory wherein gender-biased attitudes become a self-fulfilling prophecy; (3) curriculum materials biased in language, content, and/or illustrations; (4) unfriendly classroom climate and harassment; and (5) administrative modeling (administration department tends to be more male). While gender equity has received considerable attention in K-12 education, it has received considerably less attention in teacher education. Efforts are being made to improve the situation: institutes, state projects, and at least one teacher education program are promoting it; materials are being developed; professional publications are beginning to cover gender equity issues; professional meetings are devoting some time to it; and individual teacher educators are starting to become concerned about it. (Contains 14 references.) (LL)

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TEACHER EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUITY

ERIC DIGEST May 1997

by

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Teacher Education and Gender Equity

Jo Sanders

Those learning how to teach today will be responsible for teaching the next two generations of Americans. If we want an America in which girls and boys are treated, and treat each other, with respect and kindness, and in which girls as well as boys are urged and expected to fulfill their potential without restriction, then we must begin teaching about gender equity in our teacher education programs as a matter of course.

How Is Gender Inequity Manifested?

Fennema (1990) defines gender equity as the set of behaviors and knowledge that permits educators to recognize inequality in educational opportunities, to carry out specific interventions that constitute equal educational treatment, and to ensure equal educational outcomes. Accordingly, what should teacher educators be teaching preservice students about gender equity?

Expectations and attitudes

The notions that males excel in mathematics, science, and technology and that females excel in the arts are two of many beliefs and cultural influences that are passed down through generations. The dynamic is all the more powerful in that adults may not realize they are holding these beliefs and acting on them. Subtle and unintended messages can create the idea among girls and boys that there are fields they cannot be successful in because of their sex. Children reflect and reinforce this attitude through their peer interactions.

Attributional theory

Gender-biased attitudes become a self-fulfilling prophecy, strengthened by the fact that many girls attribute their success as due to luck, which is fickle, while many boys attribute theirs to ability, which is reliable. This helps to explain the lower self-confidence, despite higher performance, of many girls in school. It is essential that preservice students develop the ability to decipher these messages in order to counteract them (American

Association of University Women Educational Foundation [AAUW], 1992/95).

Curriculum and assessment

Curriculum materials that are biased in language, content, and/or illustrations reinforce the idea that some fields are gender specific. Preservice teachers need to learn to perceive the usually subtle but powerful cumulative impact of curriculum materials on girls' and boys' understanding of the world and their places in it, and to learn to teach in ways that enable students to relate to all aspects of the world without limitation (Rosser, 1990).

Classroom climate and harassment

Years of research have documented unequal and too often unfriendly classroom environments for girls and for some boys (Sandler, Silverberg, & Hall, 1996; Sadker, M. & Sadker, D., 1994; Lockheed, 1985). Teachers are almost always unaware of the biased behaviors they exhibit through verbal interactions, eye contact, and body language, which means they cannot correct themselves. When preservice teachers learn about these behaviors at the start of their careers, bias is much more amenable to conscious control.

Student-to-student behavior is another problem area when boys are permitted to harass girls (and other boys) sexually or otherwise because this is seen as normal male behavior. Preservice students need to understand that the recipient of such behavior cannot be expected to learn well and that those who perpetrate it are also poorly served (Streitmatter, 1994).

Administrative modeling

In many schools of education, the administration department faculty tends to be more male, which parallels superintendents and principals in school districts, especially at the high school level. The curriculum department faculty tend to be more female, which parallels classroom teachers, especially at the elementary

level. Education deans are more likely to be male; however the number of female department chairs is increasing. This overall model perpetuates an unequal division of influence and reward in the education establishment.

Gender Equity, Teacher Education, and Reform

Gender equity has received considerable attention in K-12 education since Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, but not in teacher education. Unlike special and bilingual education, for example, gender equity is not thought to merit whole departments or even courses. Yet, teacher education is the point at which future educators are accessible in methods and foundations courses, are there to learn, have time to learn, and don't have years of bad teaching habits to undo. Unlike one-shot inservice workshops, semester-length courses permit real change. This is also the only point when future teachers are able to observe equities and inequities by other teachers in the classroom, and to experiment with their own teaching methods.

It is important for inservice educators to understand gender equity and the relatively easy ways to reverse the messages of inequity (Sanders, 1994). However, teacher education textbooks virtually ignore the subject. A 1980 analysis of 24 commonly used texts published since 1972 found that 23 of them gave less than 1% of space to gender issues, and a third didn't mention the topic at all (Sadker, D. & Sadker, M., 1980). In a 1993 update on this theme, Titus analyzed 8 post-1990 teacher education textbooks and concluded that the most widely used foundations textbooks still do not include significant material on gender equity.

In a Michigan survey of 30 administrators and 247 faculty members from 30 preservice teacher education programs statewide, it was found that only 11% of respondents reported extensive gender equity instruction and 38% reported

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minimal to no gender equity instruction. Respondents thought gender equity should be taught more and said more interest from students and colleagues and more coverage in the professional literature would help (Mader, 1994).

A survey of 353 methods instructors in mathematics, science, and technology nationwide revealed that while three-fourths of the respondents said they taught gender equity, they did so less than 2 hours per semester. Respondents felt that specific teaching strategies would be most helpful and that gender equity was an important social issue (Campbell & Sanders, 1997).

What Efforts Are Being Made?

The Teacher Education Equity Project (1993-96, National Science Foundation [NSF], IBM, Hewlett Packard, and AT&T funding) was conducted at the City University of New York Graduate Center. Sixty-one professors of mathematics, science, and technology education from 40 colleges and universities in 28 states learned how to teach gender equity to their preservice methods students and carried out mini-grant projects. Evaluation results indicated that 85% of the professors made significant improvements in their gender equity teaching behavior, with a tripling of syllabi containing gender equity (Sanders, Campbell, & Steinbrueck, 1996). Materials for including gender equity in teacher education via classroom observations, action research projects, and student assignments are now becoming available (Sanders, Koch, & Urso, in press).

A statewide project, Integrating Gender Equity and Reform (1995-98, NSF funding), involves Georgia Institute of Technology as the lead institution among six other universities and organizations. This project will help teacher educators with materials and methods for teaching gender equity to preservice teachers.

The Teacher Education Mentor Project (1996-99, NSF funding) is designed to

make gender equity instruction more systemically taught in mathematics, science, and technology education programs. Teams of teacher educators, partner school personnel, and others at seven colleges and universities will participate.

The Marymount Institute for the Education of Women and Girls in Tarrytown, New York, has a major focus on gender equity in teacher education.

In 1996, the U.S. Department of Education's Gender Equity Expert Panel, including a subpanel on teacher preparation, began work to design and implement a process for identifying, reviewing, and recommending promising and exemplary programs, products, and practices to educators and community members.

Conclusion

In gender equity, teacher education is a last frontier that is finally beginning to open up. Materials are now being developed, professional publications are beginning to cover gender equity issues, professional meetings are devoting some time to it, and individual teacher educators are starting to become concerned about it. Gender equity could become a hot topic in teacher education, just in time for the next two generations.

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References identified with an EJ or ED number have been abstracted and are in the ERIC database. Journal articles (EJ) should be available at most research libraries; most documents (ED) are available in microfiche collections at more than 1,000 locations. Documents can also be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service: (800) 443-ERIC.

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